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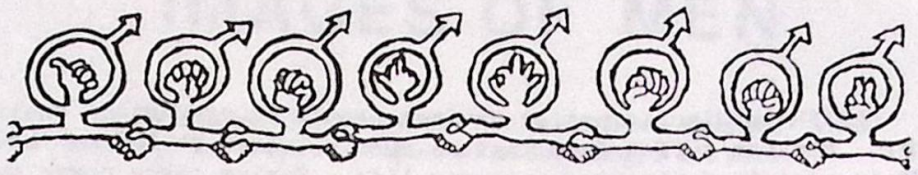
MEN SPEAKING OUT ON MEN AND SEXISM

NUMBER ONE



MEN SPEAKING OUT ON MEN AND SEXISM

Welcome to ' men speaking out on men and sexism ' number one. This will be the fourth booklet we have put out . The first booklet was a reprint of an old article called ' The Socialized Penis ' by Jack Litewka from ' Reading for men against sexism ' . Unfortunately this book (like most books) appeared to offer only a middle class view of society and sexism . Fed up with this " privileged ghetto image " we decided to put some of our own ideas together . With our second and third booklets " Sex and Men " and " Love and Men " we put together a collection of the thoughts and feelings of several men about sexism , sex , love , themselves and other men .

This fourth and first of what we hope will be many is a ' the political is also personal ' issue . The next will be a ' treating sexism seriously ' issue . We hope to tackle many important and meaningful issues with these booklets in the most 'down to earth' accessible way possible . Please write if you feel like communicating, criticizing or getting involved .

care of
M.A.S.S ,
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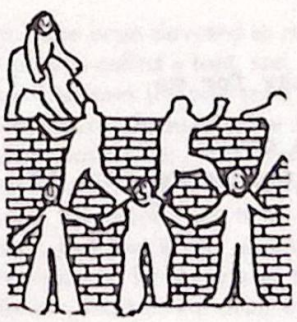
Why a ' the political is also personal ' issue ? ----
It's all very well sitting round talking about how screwed up we feel but we should be out there --- tackling sexism in society ! BUT talking openly about ourselves , about being men is tackling sexism - communicating - changing our attitudes . Somewhere along the line we have got to take responsibility for our behaviour and do something to change it .



SEXISM is discrimination against people on grounds of their gender . Men can suffer from that as much as women do BUT men have POWER in society dominating everyday life . Sexism takes power away from women and gives it to men --- working against women most of all . Everywhere , in the factories , on the streets , in the pub, in our homes and in our heads .

SYSTEM SYSTEM

System system your strangling me
I'm just anther small part
Of your machinery
Told what to think what to feel what to be
And no-one has a clue you do it so subtley

System system what a way to go
Your killing me slowly & i just don't know
You closed our eyes told us a pack of lies
So we don't even notice
We're not living our own lives

Well system system i don't need you
To tell me what i'm supposed to do
System system your fulla shit
Spent my whole life running round in it

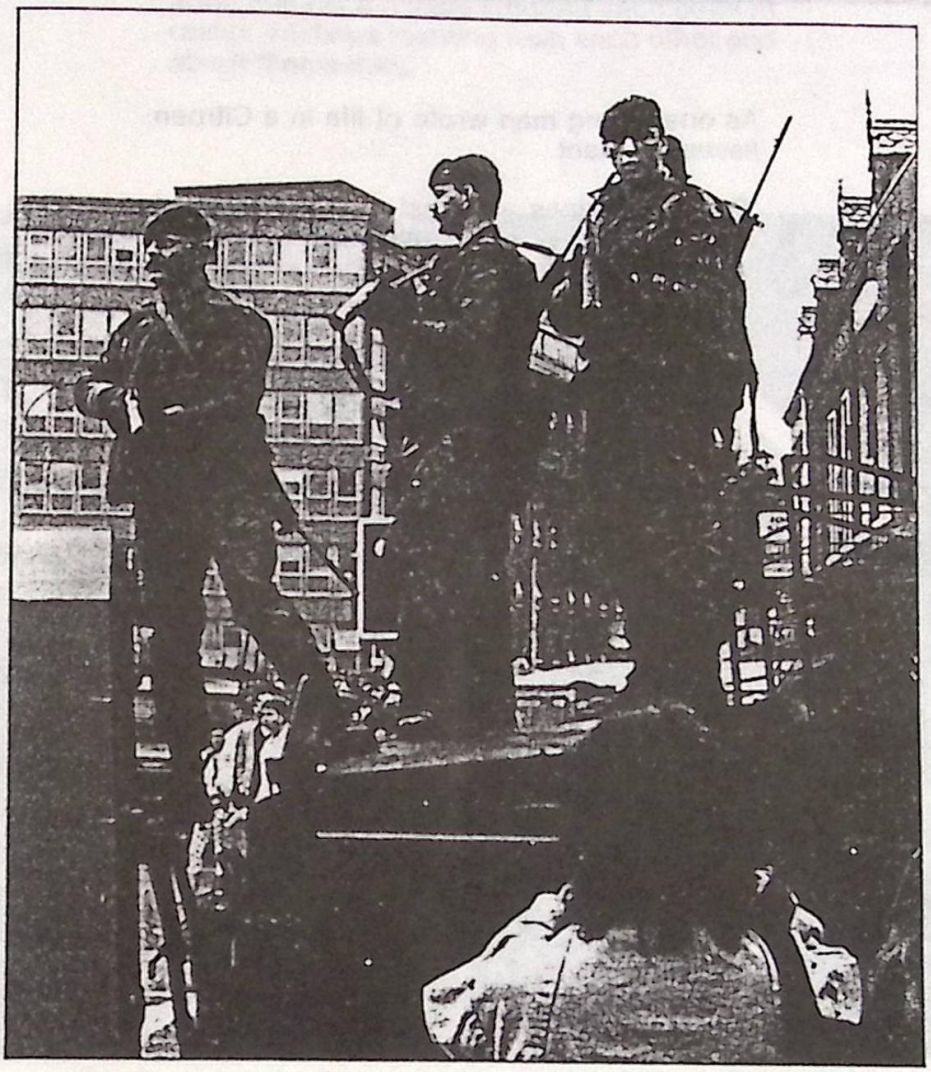
System system fills me fulla dread
But i got big brother inside of my head
He showed me who was boss & i related to him
I wanted power too
Just like all the other men

System system made a man outa me
And i can use this to the best of my ability
We put the women down
When she try & have her say
And we pin the women down
When ever we wanna play

System system made it easy for me
But this ain't equality
System system your fulla shit
But we gotta change too cos we're full it

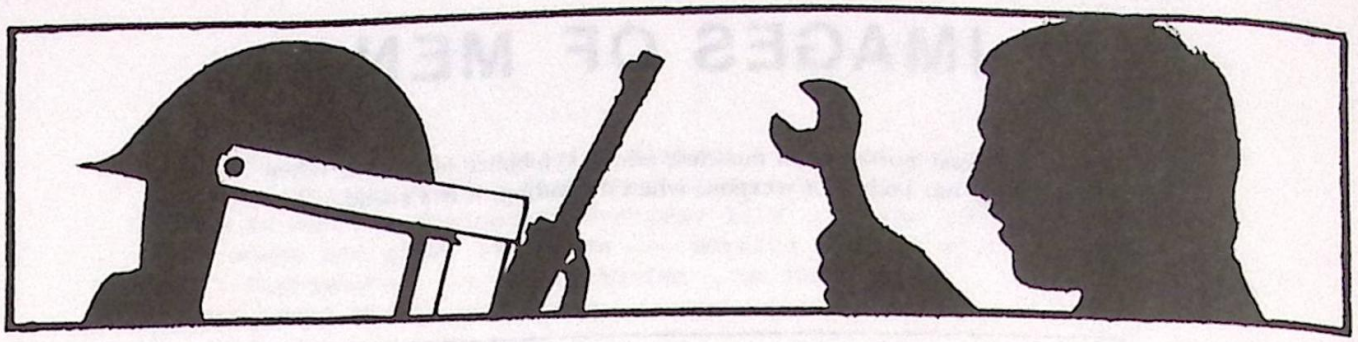
IMAGES OF MEN

We encase ourselves in muscles, which symbolize manhood. When attacking, our body is a weapon; when defending, it is a shield.



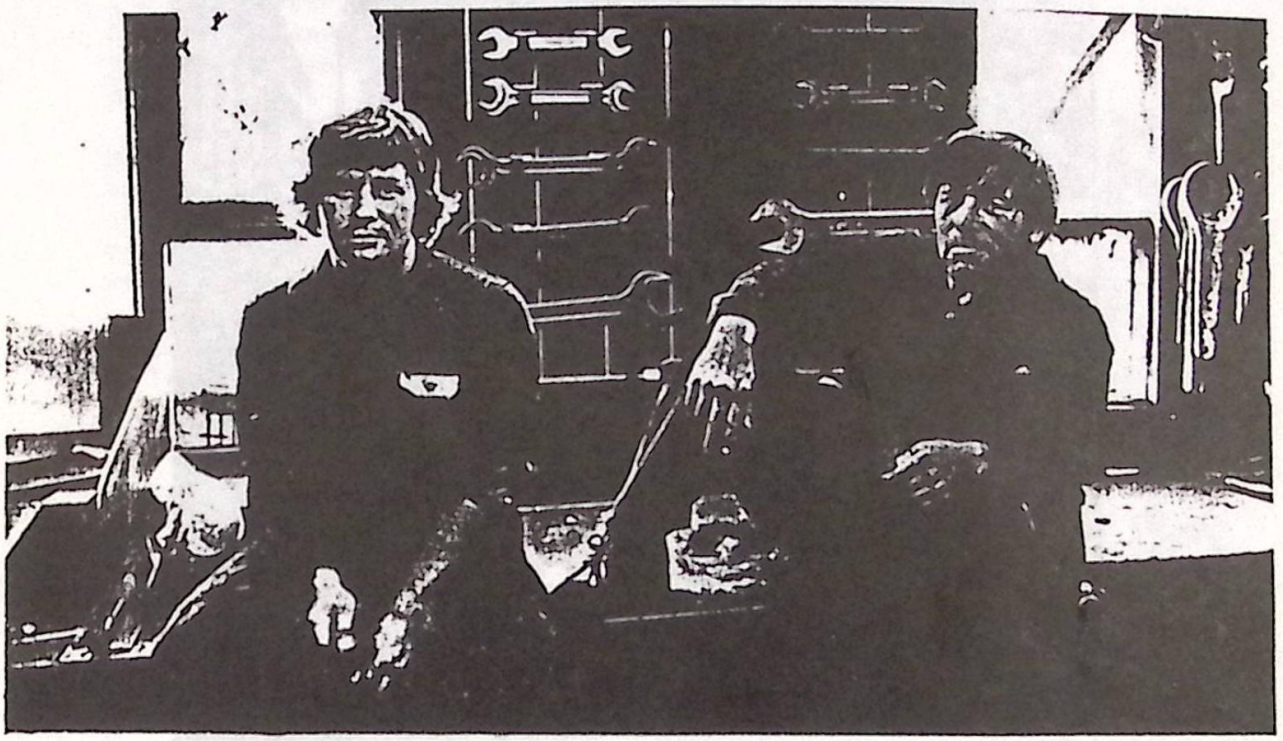
As Soldiers, our bodies have been devoted to combat. We have cultivated its toughness. The penis—called a tool, rod, prick, or pistol when our language turns coarse—becomes the sole repository of our sexuality. Through it we shall give pleasure; through it we shall receive. Trapped within these self-imposed limitations, the Soldier is virtually incapacitated when he meets women. We reduce our sexuality to an organ requiring periodic discharge. If women wish to be quickly overpowered, a shot of semen will suffice. But few if any women find such sexuality fulfilling. Women do not want to be targets in some sexual shooting range. They want to be lovers, held in a mutual embrace.

The Soldier assumes that whatever pleases him pleases women. If it doesn't, he assumes something is wrong with *them*. If women are not satisfied by our lovemaking, then they are frigid or oversexed. If they do not love the Soldier, then they are not real women. We want women to act like "women," even if they have to pretend, because we have forced ourselves to act like "men."



As one young man wrote of life in a Citroen assembly plant.

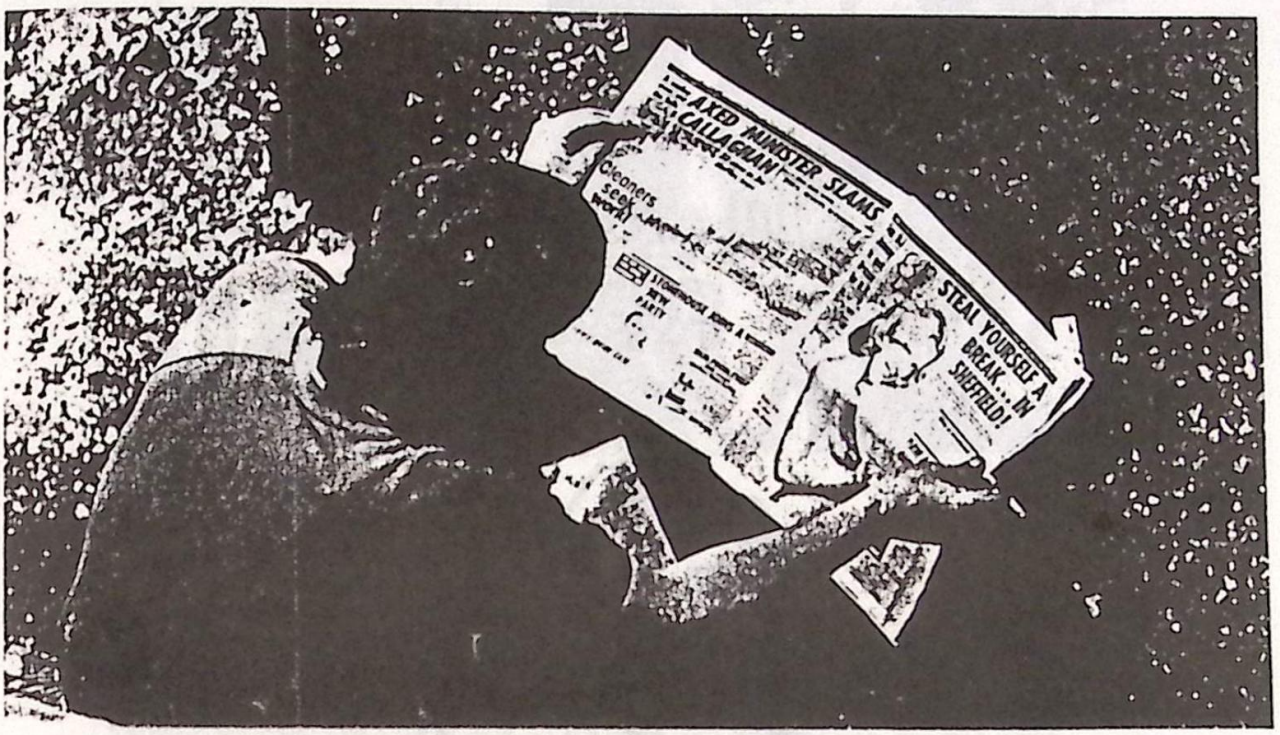
"Porn magazines amongst the metallic dust and the filthy grey overalls: a painful impression. Prisoners' fantasies"



The pain here is a deep one; wounding at many levels. Often the fantasies bear little relation to 'life'. Often too (and this is much more damaging) they become transposed onto life, dominating it and sexuality.

In ways like this, the rhythms of the machine – driving, enduring, persistent – are imposed upon the world of sexuality and sexual relations. The masculine sexual boast is a boast about output: how many, how often, how long . . . It is a boast which eschews ideas of tenderness and care. It is an expression of a mechanical sexuality, and one which, at best, leaves women less than satisfied; at worst, the consequence for women is fear and humiliation. More and more it is the case that the women who share workplaces with men (mostly as subordinates, often in a minority) complain of sexual harassment. Complain too of the pornography which contrasts so graphically with *their* lives and their understandings of themselves.

"Some of the girls don't like it; they get upset about it in fact. I've just learned to ignore it. To me it's just stupid. But sometimes I do think: what would the men think about working in a place, run by women and with lots of photographs of naked men on the walls. They laugh about it, but they wouldn't like it."
It can be said for those all-too-rare workplaces where men and women *do* meet in numbers and on some kind of equal basis that there at least, male and female confront each other in reality. Perhaps learning from each other and about themselves.

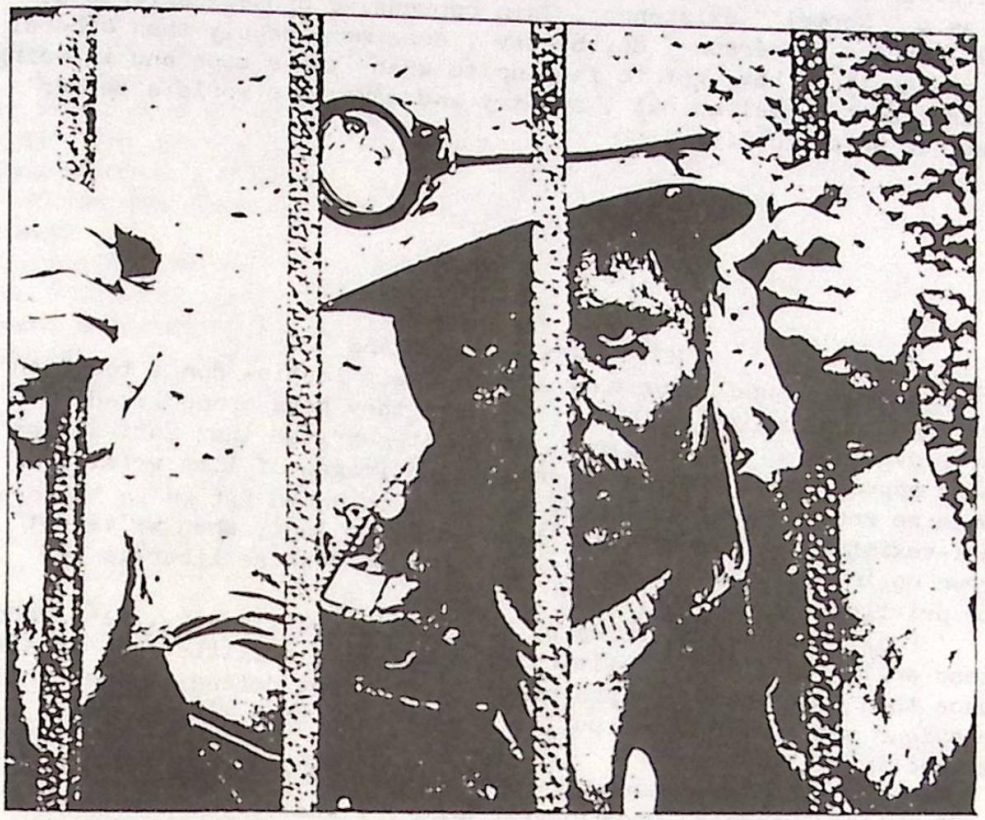


One of the most sexually explicit films to receive critical acclaim in the seventies was Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris*. A man, played by Marlon Brando, has anal intercourse with a young woman. Bertolucci languorously displays the woman's entire body, from every detail of her breasts to the finest strands of pubic hair, before the camera's unflinching eye. Although he is portrayed as the aggressive and dynamic lover, the Soldier on the battlefield of Eros, the man remains unexposed; his genitalia are invisible throughout. It is the woman who is expected to take her armor off. It is the woman who is exposed, not to enemy fire, but to the uncaring eyes of tens of millions of strangers. Asked why he left the shots of Brando's genitals on the cutting room floor, Bertolucci first claimed that he "cut it out for structural reasons, to shorten the film." Then he admitted, "It is also possible that I had so identified myself with Brando that I cut it out of shame for myself. To show him naked would have been like showing myself naked."

RAPE

" WHAT IS RAPE " All men are taught to rape women psychologically if not through physical violence . I grew up lonely : without any strong friendships , male or female ; put down by other boys for my weakness and lack of aggressiveness ; and starved for affection, sexual and emotional . So i spent many years pushing women to get whatever i could from them sexually and emotionally . Often my needs for friendship got caught in a conflict with my 'needs' for sex, and i turned off or drove away women who might have been my good friends because i was more interested in sleeping with them than sharing myself .

MORE THAN AN ISSUE



SEXISM , CLASS AND BULLSHIT

A big problem involved in the struggle against sexism is class. Most areas of society like schools , the places we work at , the people who push us around , are part of the middle class acting on behalf of the ruling class in return for a ' piece of the cake ' - a measure of power . The ruling class allow this safely zone, this buffer ' the middle class class ' for their own survival and to prevent real change . Meanwhile the working class , the ones that are taught they are thick , vulgar , lazy and somehow failures are to busy trying to survive to be able to unite to create an equal better world and better lives for themselves . Sexism , Racism , Class etc are all used by the ruling and middle class to keep the majority of people - the working class - oppressed .

Sexism is a tool of our oppressors . By being sexist we as men are shitting not only on our sisters but also ourselves " cut the bullshit " .

It needs to be said .... again and again , break the stereotypes, break the chains which bind us as men , as womyn , as people , as oppressors , as the oppressed .

It's about creating a living revolution , it's about love and LIBERTION .

Trouble is we were all born into this reality and grow up , accepting it as a " Normal " existence . This oppressive process affects us all , person to person , day by day , some more deeply than others. To change it we have got to face up to what it has done and is doing to us , sort ourselves out , and try and make this world a better place in which to live .

MORE THOUGHTS ON CLASS

There is only one issue that middle class lefties don't touch on and that is class and unfortunately one they have monopolized for their own ends is anti-sexism . I am not suprised that anti-sexism lacks appeal when it seems to conjure up images of limp wristed, dungaree wearing , middle class men ? Where do we fit in to the present anti-sexist thing , when we've been jack the lad , when we've not grown up in middle class families , when we despise liberals and the privileged lives they lead .

' Pacifism ' the politics of the privileged i'd say , also middle class anti-sexism - the politics of those with a little more breathing space than most working class people . I do not defend anyones shitty behaviour yet i can't take politics seriously that lack a class perspective .

I have had the misfortune to come into contact with quite a few middle class lefties . Once upon a time , i was very intimidated by the moralistic values of the supposedly ' Aware ' (what a bullshit word) middle class's . I felt guilty for wanking , for my own desires as a man , for my ' vulgar 'language , for hating the police, for getting a buzz out of anti-fascist activity . I've got to say that i've been a bit of a casualty of the " gettoised alternative " moral majority . Although i'm pleased to say that i got rid of the bullshit ideas i picked up (or caught) from the middle class values i was exposed to .

a world of sharp class contradictions

Once upon a time i was under the illusion that women had a really sussed " scene " going . I now know better , thank god . Some things i've enjoyed reading have been , " I Claudia " and " Love lies bleeding " and amongst a few other things , " Pink Brick". I reckon at the moment depending on which kinds of circles you mix with , you can get pretty fucked up by some peoples twisted anti-sexist ideas as you can by sexist ones . I remember a bloke coming up to me a few year's ago and asking quietly whether it was sexist to fancy someone . It seems from my experience repression was the order of the day amongst the supposedly anti-sexist people i hung about with .

I'd say liberation was secondary to a lot of armchair " anti-sexists " it seem's more pleasure can be gained from sitting in judgement and wagging a moralistic finger at those who are "sexist". By looking at how some anti-sexist people judge other people's behaviour you would think they were flawless saint's and when such individuals are just spectators of a class system , and play no part in bringing about change , i'd say it's cool to think they're full of shit .

Today i see anti-sexism as a part of many other struggles to bring about a classless society . I reject liberal attitudes , such as pacifism . I just see it as part and parcel of an irelevant and " politically " naive group of individuals left over from the peace movement . People who ask for peace within capitalism must be fairly naive , in that they have no understanding of its aims and principles .

Anti-sexism for me is about getting sussed out , talking about what's going on inside my head , listening to other's doing the same. Sharing my experience , getting rid of guilt , being positive , overcoming my fear's and my hang up's . For me it's not about wearing dunggarees and acting efeminite , and it's not about role reversal. It's about doing my share of the work with kids , learning to listen. It's about responsibility for my action's (babysitting , wearing a johnny etc) and getting myself sorted out . I think the insecurities fetched about by living in a fucked up , alienated society (capitalist one) are what create's " sexist " (?) behaviour . I think anyone who wander's round with the belief that sexism is the thing , the issue , and does not look a bit further to see what's behind such behaviour . I think they're pretty fucked (innocent , naive) . A time when men (cause the majority are working class) take more seriously " anti-sexist " ideas will be when they are presented in an accesible way , a way in which it's language and ideas are digestable . It's no wonder most people ignore most politic's cause most politic's ignore most people .

P .S .I've put " anti-sexism " in explanation marks (or whatever they are cause i don't go along 100% with the definition).

I see kicking in a fascist as a positive step toward's a freer world, just as much as i do helping someone out .

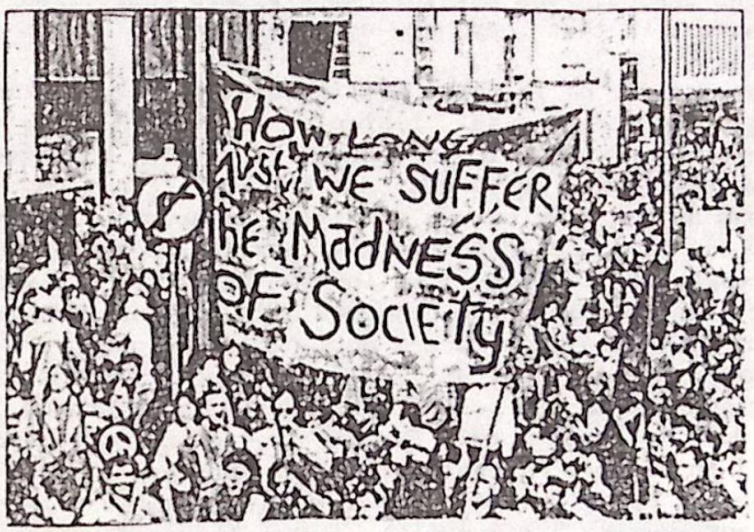
SORTING OURSELVES OUT - ARE WE?

Some things I often hear or am told:- 'Sexism is just not that important, its a side issue really.'

'Underneath it all I know men and womed are equal but I'm not that sexist really, so I don't worry about it.'

'Why worry about it we all eat, drink and shit whether we are men or women, sexism is just an excuse to make up even more rules and create bigger hang-ups for ourselves than we are suffering from now.'

What strikes me most about all this stuff is how often I hear it and who I always hear it from - other blokes, doing what we always seem to do - sweeping our sexism, our homophobia, our embarrassment, our shame and guilt (that we don't need) and our hidden selves (that are part of us and we do need) under the carpet. This secret but obvious part, the unnecessary male part of ourselves that we think really counts - the tough bit, the bit with balls, also helps make us emotional cripples leaving us feeling continuously stressed, tensed up, oversensitive or aggressive and treating women as objects to use or shoulders to cry on. By being like this we are also refusing to cope and change ourselves. By caring about what sexism does to women we are also caring about what it does to ourselves.



Whether it's weapons or washing powder, the ever-escalating cycle of the few profiting from the misery of the many continues. As part of the sales promotion for this cycle, the boys in the advertising department - aiming specifically at the male breadwinner - came up with the subliminal penis, i.e., we never see it but it's always there, and the idea that there is a Great Penis in the Sky becomes implanted in our consciousnesses with all the organised viciousness which a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do entails... And you know, as a marketing concept and as a power role the idea grew, and nowadays of course it's bigger than Jesus.

The result being that we men rarely see our true selves and if we do we are embarrassed by our true selves. Our sexuality has been distorted beyond recognition, and in the confusion which this brings we generally fuck up whatever we do, wherever we go. The more we put off getting to know ourselves, the more they take from us our will to find out for ourselves. It's up to us....

PERSONAL POWER

LEARNING HOW TO LOVE - AGAIN.

From a very early age, my natural desires to love and co-operate were systematically taken away from me and replaced with the more sinister un-natural desires to compete and hate. Desires which clever people exploit for profit and war. The following is an experience that brought this home to me.

Recently I met someone who changed my life. She showed me how to love again, and perhaps more significantly, that I mustn't be afraid to show it.

After years of schools that had forced me to compete against my friends, academically and physically, years of parents whose only outwardly visable signs of emotion to me or each other were violent, and years of TV programmes that used fear, hate and pain to boost their ratings, I had become fearful of expressing my love tp people because of the ridicule and embarresment I was sure would follow. I was wrong.

During our time together, she gradually broke through the defensive barriers I had erected around myself. I learned how to talk, kiss and hug all over again. Only this time it was all about mutual respect, not male dominated physical sex. Twenty two years of indoctrination flew out of the window and I felt more relaxed and free than I ever had before.

Our final day together is a memory I will always cherish, and although we both had to go our separate ways, (I was moving up north) we parted sadly having learned a lot from each other, but I certainly felt more excited than I ever had before. Ruth had helped me to find myself again, and then how to share it with someone else,

I put my new found freedom into practise when I went out for a final good-bye drink with my friends.I hugged and kissed both my male and female friends while I cried my eyes out. This was obviously too much for some of the people in that samll-town pub to handle. Whispers of 'gay', 'bender', 'queer', were exchanged but it didn't matter anymore. And when my mates hugged and kissed me back something that would have never happened before, (they're all 'tough, macho blokes' my mates), I realised that showing your love really does help people to share theirs.

The state really does need hate, and I can now honestly see why it is so scared of love. Its where, I think, ultimately our strength will come from to confront it in all its manifestations.

DARE TO DREAM

For me, the coming of sleep fetches in a quiet freedom allowing myself to dissolve into dreams, thoughts and ideas that no-one else can touch. Those minutes preluding slumber often feel like the best time Ive had all day. If Ive had a good day, I can playback the best parts of it again in my head. If Ive had a crap day I can forget it by imagining something else instead.

So, last night I was in bed and feeling good about it. Warm and safe wrapped up in my duvet. I had myself to myself once more in My Secret Place. Outside the covers the air was cold and as I squirmed happily about in my lovely warm bed, I could just about see through the darkness my breath vaporising as it spoke from my lips in rythmic silence. This night I was going to have a sexual fantasy.

I have had hardly any sexual fantasies compared with most men I know. They dont seem to come on their own and the idea of making them happen perhaps by focusing my mind onto a couple of athletic young women and making them have sex with me, seems totally absurd even repulsive as far as Im concerned. I dont like the idea of forcing a scenario to happen even and especially when its only happening in my head.

But dreams are different. In dreams I havent got a clue whats gonna happen. I may be climbing a mountain one moment, flying across a lake the next and maybe possibly, and this time it dosnt seem so bad, a couple of athletic young women will be having sex with me.

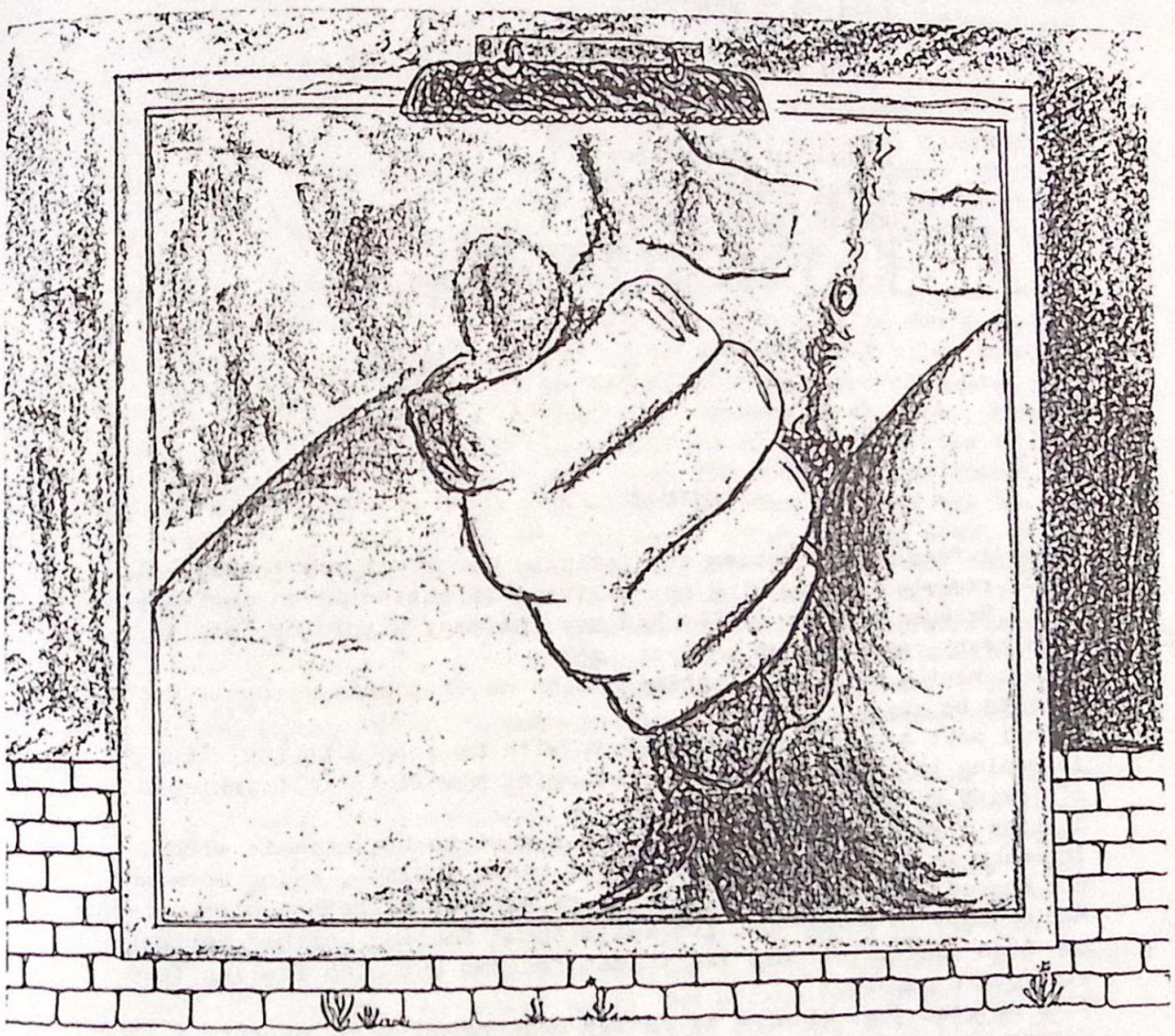
The difference is, I can construct fantasies but I cant devise and control my own dreams and so while I can fantasize about having dreams like that, It will only happen of its own accord - and then it may mean something.

Which brings me back to what happened last night as I tried to focus my mind onto someone I could have imaginary sex with. After a few vague faces had floated by I was suddenly confronted with the image of my hand steadily caressing a mans chest. I stopped the image and looked for something else - found myself with another man, then another. Shit. What was happening. Try as I might I couldnt get any women onto the screen inside my head. Then an image from Junior School; a feared male teacher gesturing me up to his desk to mark my work. I look at the floor, he looks at me. "Your a handsome boy arnt you." An image of a friend telling me, "Go for it, you'd make a nice little pouf."
I was so scared, I was only half awake and I was getting really frantic. Scared of the idea of me being gay. Scared that I was a pouf. Really, really SCARED.

As I wasnt completely asleep, I was able to push myself out of semi-consciousness and scrawl down some of the images I had seen.
As I wrote, (and I was barely able to because I was so sleepy) the fear left me. It was like Id got the images out of my head and onto paper, where I could now choose either to ignore them or explore them. I went back to sleep and dreamed.

my thoughts race through my head like a motor car
steadily, determinedly rushing along a mountain road
there is no other traffic-the road is clear
it is going somewhere fast
it is on its way
it is gleaming

So what the fuck is happening to me. Should I take notice of these images. Am I someday in the future going to "come out". I feel its a distinct possibility. But what of the Fear I felt during the dream/ fantasy. Is that just common Homophobia or is it something more. I fear the label Gay. I hate the idea of being round other gay men and feeling that I am like them. I can talk about it now because now I am not gay. I have many gay friends most of whom seem very happy about. Most of my straight friends dont seem to care either way. They dont seem to have any fear about it. One told me after I told him all this that perhaps Im just Bisexual-a bit of both. That brought a bit of relief to me because it means that if I wanted to, I could still carry on sleeping with women and appear Normal and feel it. Maybe the truth is that I am normal and everyone else experiences feelings like this but dont ever say anything about it.
Who knows. I havent drawn many conclusions from all this but if any one else can please get in touch. thanks.



SOMETHING PERSONAL

I look in the mirror,
I see my face,
Today I can't face the human race.

I look in the mirror,
I see a mess,
Today I can't face the human race.

I look in the mirror,
I see my fat,
Feeling disgusted,
I turn away,
Today I still can't face, the human race.

I look in the mirror,
I feel unattractive,
Unable to show pain,
If I only knew how others felt,
Today I might just face the human race.

INTIMACY

I can't recall ever having any intimate times with my family . I can't remember ever giving or receiving affection in an intimate way . Because i never really had any intimacy within my family , i've never really known what it is ?
When i meet a man who is intimate with me it scares me cos i don't want to be gay .
When i meet a women who is intimate with me i love it and cling to it hoping it'll never go away , wrapping myself in it frightened of losing such a rare thing .
I think i am to selective about who i want to be intimate with .
Intimacy as i understand it is about being LOVING , being open and not scared of being judged , being relaxed with another nice person.
Making love in a loving , fun way without feeling either partner has been used . Intimacy isn't just freedom but also feeling free with other people .
It's no good just blaming my family background or my parents - it's deeper than that .

We received this letter some time ago . Although its a little hard to understand we still felt it made some valuable points . -----

13.02.90
CAZ Utrecht (Hol)

This is a critic of the SEX and MEN a hot potato booklet . * When a potato is too hot , you better not eat it !!! - think about this potato as one cooked by yourself . *

This potato stands for sexism as the booklet says . (another men's initiative) . The first thing i thought , when i saw the title SEX and MEN , was FRUSTRATION . After that , more cynical , THERAPY .

Two years ago i joined an anarchist men's weekend which i enjoyed a lot , suprised by the feeling it can give to be with men (positive). After that a men's group was stared . But no such feeling came back to me . There was a sort of distrust between the guys and the meeting did count more on the food that was cooked than on the honest feeling that were talked about . None of us came closer to the others (homophobia ?) . At least not by this meeting . Well there was a sort of value to the meeting , consolidation of the idea ' something is wrong ' and ' i am not alone ' . This men's group died out . And so did the next men's group i joined in Holland . (the weekend and the first group were in Britain) .

With these experiences and also very important my personel experiences in for example relations with men and women , i think the only sexism men can talk about thoroughly together (without women) is hetero-sexism . Isn't it a little bit ' macho ' to think men can live the lives of women for them ? And what's the point in not being sexist any more when there are no women around ? Most men's groups do die out and i think it is just because we don't like to talk about sex maybe because we feel insecure with other men because we are ashamed of our sexist thoughts , especially in men's groups. Well then just be ashamed but don't be ashamed about being ashamed, that doesn't make sense . We should be objective and of course not only in meeting but in all situations . Beware of fascism , racism and sexism in ourselves and all around us from South Africa to the shell station around the corner , from the houses of parliament to the local pub and from your bed to the kitchen and back again . All the time . To come back to the subject i think talking about sex comes and goes as you feel the need as with so many other things. People have narrow interest in each other , and so i think it just needs a little bit more trust in oneself . So when you or someone else has problems with your sexism , think about it as something of yourself , which it is . Talk about it with men-women , white-black ,brother-sister , father-mother . But every time be aware the place you stand as a man --- they can say NO !!

Men do belong to the oppressing half of the population , as long as men do have the most power in the world . We , men , have power as well . Should we grant it to women then ? (stupid NO) We can use it together with women for a better life for both sexes . And when the women don't want us ? I can understand it would't be very pleasant playing with my friend and my sister walks in the time . I hope by this story some potatoes aren't so hot anymore . And remember we have the luxury to 'wait' until the potato has cooled down so we can chew and swallow nicely but women can only spit it out or swallow it hot . Cause men are the cooks in this case .

I would say keep on cooking whatever you want and make your guests a nice meal , but don't be suprised someone will find a hot potato --- (probably a women) .

Every man involved with these booklets wrote for himself and himself only . None of us claims in any way to be any more clever or special than any other man . Our idea is to talk and listen and hopefully change the screwed up parts of ourselves . To break down the walls between us as individual men and the much bigger ones out there in the cruelty of society --- Smash Sexism , Smash Homophobia , Smash all forms of Oppression . CREATE FREEDOM .

A message worth listening to

We hope for the support of men who say they love freedom , but in the end our hopes lie with women , if we want to end our slavery. Any oppressed group must be in charge of their own liberation , and in the end womens interests can no more be included with the interests of men , than the workers can be included in the interests of the employers . That isn't to say that men should just sit back and wait for women to think everything out , and do all the work . In fact we're sick of listening to mens tearful accounts of how hard it is to be oppressors . If they really feel so bad about it , then they'll start by changing themselves . If we have to correct them , lecture them and remind them that we're people too , all the time , then it's obvious that they never really wanted to change in the first place .